

Key considerations when selecting software for a General Practice

Ensuring the Right Fit for Healthcare Excellence

Technology and software used in General Practice can have significant impact on operational efficiency and patient outcomes. This guide outlines considerations when selecting software to ensure that it meets practice and clinician needs and complies with health information management best practices to support improving patient care.

Understanding Practice Needs and Objectives

Before exploring software options, clearly define the practice's unique requirements. Factors to consider include:

- **Practice size and complexity:** Is it a solo GP, a small group, or a larger partnership?
- **Patient Volume:** How many patients does the practice serve weekly or monthly?
- **Services Offered:** Are there specialised clinics (e.g., chronic disease management, minor surgery, mental health)?
- **Workflow Preferences:** Is the team looking to digitise all operations or only select processes (e.g., appointments, billing)?
- **Future Growth:** Is the practice planning to expand or add new services that may require scalable software?

By considering these needs in advance, the selection process becomes more targeted and meaningful.

Core Functionalities

The software should seamlessly support the daily operations of a General Practice. Key functionalities to examine include:

- **Electronic Health Records (EHR):** The ability to securely record, store, and retrieve patient medical histories, test results, and consultation notes.
- **Appointment Scheduling:** Integrated calendars, reminders, online booking, and management of walk-ins or urgent appointments.
- **Prescriptions and Medication Management:** Electronic prescribing (ePrescribing), medication tracking, and integration with pharmacies.
- **Billing and Invoicing:** Support for Medicare, private billing, bulkbilling, and integration with financial software and payment systems.
- **Clinical Decision Support:** Access to evidence-based guidelines, alerts for drug interactions, reminders for preventive care and integration with clinical decision support tools.
- **Communication Tools:** Secure messaging between staff, and with patients (SMS, email, patient portals).
- **Reporting and Analytics:** Ability to generate reports for clinical audits, quality improvement, mandatory reporting and tender applications.

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Regulatory Compliance and Security

General Practices in Australia must adhere to strict regulations concerning patient data privacy and security. When choosing software, ensure that it:

- **Meets Australian Privacy Principles (APPs):** Compliance with the Privacy Act 1988 and any state-based requirements for health data.
- **Has Secure Data Storage:** Data encryption at rest and in transit, secure backup, disaster recovery plans, and local data residency.
- **Offers Role-Based Access:** Controls to ensure only authorised personnel can view or edit sensitive information.
- **Undergoes Regular Audits:** The vendor should demonstrate a commitment to regular software and security audits.
- **Supports Consent Management:** Tools to manage and record patient consent for data sharing and communication.

User Experience and Usability

Software should enhance productivity, not hinder it. Evaluate usability by considering:

- **Intuitive Interface:** Can staff navigate the system easily with minimal training?
- **Customisation:** Is it possible to adapt templates, forms, and dashboards to suit specific clinical or administrative needs?
- **Speed and Reliability:** Does the software perform quickly and consistently, even during peak usage?

A robust trial period or demonstration can help determine whether the software aligns with the practice's workflow and culture.

Vendor Support and Training

Even the best software can fall short without strong vendor support. It's important to assess:

- **Implementation Assistance:** Does the vendor offer onboarding, data migration, and setup support?
- **Training Resources:** Are there comprehensive guides, tutorials, and ongoing training sessions for staff?
- **Customer Support:** What are the response times for critical issues?
- **IT Support:** Is your IT service provider familiar with this software and supports it?
- **Update Policy:** How frequently is the software updated, and what is involved in undertaking the upgrades?

Cost and Value

Budget considerations are vital, but cost should be weighed against value. Key aspects include:

- **Upfront and Ongoing Costs:** Are there hidden costs for implementation, support, or upgrades?
- **Return on Investment (ROI):** Will the software save time, reduce errors, or enable billing efficiencies that offset its cost?
- **Longevity:** Does the software support general practice enhancements and have future proofing for changes that may arise due to Commonwealth implementation? or will upgrades and additional financial investment be required?
- **Contract Terms:** What are the terms concerning termination, data ownership, access to and use of data?

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Fact Sheet

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Interoperability

Modern healthcare increasingly relies on seamless data exchange. Ensure the software:

- **Supports Industry Standards:** Such as HL7, FHIR, or other protocols required for interoperability in Australia.
- **Integrates with National Systems:** Such as My Health Record, the Australian Immunisation Register, National Cancer Screening Register (NCSR), ePrescribing services and Primary Sense.
- **Supports secure communications:** Integrates with Secure Messaging services for sending and receiving information with other health care providers and supports eRequesting with pathology and diagnostic imaging services.
- **Works with Third-Party Tools:** Scheduling, telehealth, pathology, AI note taking, or imaging solutions used by the practice.

Patient Engagement Capabilities

Software with strong patient engagement tools can enhance satisfaction and health outcomes.

Features to consider:

- **Patient Portal:** Allows patients to book appointments, view results, and communicate securely with the practice.
- **Automated Reminders:** SMS, email, or app notifications for appointments, recalls, and preventive care.
- **Telehealth Integration:** Support for virtual consultations, in line with Medicare and privacy requirements.

Customisation and Flexibility

Every practice operates differently. Software should be flexible enough to accommodate unique workflows and preferences:

- **Template Management:** Customisable clinical notes, referral letters, and care plans.
- **Workflow Automation:** Automate routine tasks such as recalls, follow-ups, and prescription renewals.
- **Role-Based permissions:** Tailor permissions for clinicians, nurses, and administrative staff.

Reputation and References

A vendor's reputation can offer valuable insights. Consider:

- **Market Share:** Is the software widely used in the Australian primary care sector?
- **References:** Ask for references from similar practices or consult peer reviews and industry publications.
- **Vendor Longevity:** How long has the company been supporting General Practices, and what is their track record for innovation and support?

Why invest time in software selection?

Selecting software for a General Practice is a significant decision with daily implications for both staff and patients. By scoping their administrative and clinical requirements, and systematically assessing the software's core features, practices can identify suitable software options inclusive of security measures, ease of use, technical support, and compatibility with other key systems. It is advisable to ask questions, confirm that the software meets all necessary requirements, involve relevant practice team members, request demonstrations, and trial the software where possible. This will ensure that the software supports GPs and their teams in sustainably delivering safer, more efficient and patient-centred care.

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General Practice Software Selection Checklist

<input type="checkbox"/>	Ensure the software supports regulatory compliance	Regulatory Compliance and Security
<input type="checkbox"/>	Test usability and user experience for all staff roles	User Experience and Usability
<input type="checkbox"/>	Request a demonstration and trial period if available	User Experience and Usability
<input type="checkbox"/>	Assess vendor support services and ongoing maintenance	Cost and Value
<input type="checkbox"/>	Compare pricing and overall value	Cost and Value
<input type="checkbox"/>	Review integration and interoperability with other systems	Interoperability
<input type="checkbox"/>	Ensure integration supports ongoing incentive eligibility	Interoperability
<input type="checkbox"/>	Evaluate the need for customisable templates (clinical notes, referral letters, care plans)	Customisation and Flexibility
<input type="checkbox"/>	Assess workflow automation options for routine tasks (recalls, follow-ups, prescription renewals)	Customisation and Flexibility
<input type="checkbox"/>	Check for role-based permissions suitable for clinicians, nurses, and administrative staff	Customisation and Flexibility
<input type="checkbox"/>	Assess the software vendor's market share in the Australian primary care sector	Reputation and References
<input type="checkbox"/>	Assess the software vendor's reputation and track record for innovation and support by obtaining references from similar practices or peer reviews	Reputation and References

Further information

WA Primary Health Alliance advises that the information provided in this resource is general advice only and has been prepared without considering your individual objectives, financial situation and needs. Information is only current at the date initially published. Persons implementing any recommendations contained in this publication must exercise their own independent skill or judgement or seek appropriate professional advice relevant to their own practice requirements.

Additional resources and information you may consider can be found at the following links:

- ADHA - [5. Standards for systems and technologies](#)
- RACGP - [RACGP - Software and applications](#) or [RACGP A4 documents - with cover](#)
- AVANT - [Choosing your medical practice software - Avant](#)
- AMA - [10 Minimum Standards for Advancing Digital Health in General Practice | Australian Medical Association](#)

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